



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

RESEARCH BRIEFING

ISSN 1366-803X

RB 1/2002

January 2002

CAREERS PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AT KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

Key Findings

- ❖ Within post-primary schools there was a considerable emphasis on the provision of careers education. Schools used a number of different ways of organising careers provision from, for example, weekly careers periods through to modular provision.
- ❖ Almost 80% of schools reported that they used specialist teachers, that is, teachers whose subject areas included careers education. However, it is important to note that just under one third of schools reported that none of these specialist teachers had a recognised careers qualification.
- ❖ While 85% of schools reported that their Heads of Careers Department had a written job description, only 41% of schools indicated that other teachers involved in careers provision had specific reference to careers in their job descriptions.
- ❖ Most work experience activity took place from Year 12 onwards, usually involving a range of employer types and lasting five days per placement.

- ❖ Mock interviews occurred most often in Year 12 and involved a range of interviewers including employers, the Northern Ireland Business Education Partnership (NIBEP), Industry Matters, the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) and school staff. The evidence suggested that most schools conducted mock interviews during the second term of the school year.
- ❖ In terms of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), 95% of schools made use of careers software and 55% of schools made use of the Internet as part of careers education.
- ❖ The data suggest that training is a key issue for schools with large numbers of participants not having had formal training in such a key area of the curriculum. Training should focus on providing up-to-date information in an accessible way to pupils, utilising ICT in an effective, planned manner which encourages a planned and co-ordinated coverage of careers.
- ❖ There is scope for developing a more formal structure for careers departments, as the evidence from schools suggested loose structures which may prevent the development of best practice and co-ordination with other subject areas throughout schools.

INTRODUCTION

1. The importance of careers education to young people and to Northern Ireland's economic development has been emphasised in a number of publications, particularly the Economic Development Strategy Review Steering Group's Strategy 2010 and the earlier 1995 Review of Careers Education and Guidance.

2. BDO Stoy Hayward was commissioned by the Department of Education to undertake a survey of all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland in order to gather evidence on the provision of careers education.

3. The overall aims of the project were:
 - ❖ to quantify the current levels of careers provision by year groups within all post-primary schools;
 - ❖ to quantify perceived weaknesses or areas of difficulty in the present arrangements; and
 - ❖ to identify potentially useful ways forward.

4. The project's specific aims included:
 - ❖ to complete the existing information base in terms of the time allocation for careers education in each year group;
 - ❖ to analyse the proportions of total time devoted to specific careers activities;
 - ❖ to identify the range of activities undertaken;
 - ❖ to identify perceived difficulties in the present arrangements; and
 - ❖ to identify the priorities for curriculum and staff development.

FINDINGS

Provision

5. Clearly within post-primary schools there was a considerable emphasis on the provision of careers education. Schools used a number of different ways of organising careers provision from, for example, weekly careers periods through to modular provision.

6. Although, not surprisingly, most provision centred around Year Groups 10 and above, some schools did report some provision from Year 8 onwards. By and large, schools reported that the vast majority of classes and pupils were included in such provision.

Staff involved in Careers Provision

7. Almost 80% of schools reported that they used specialist teachers, that is, teachers whose subject areas included careers education. However, it is important to note that just under one third of schools reported that none of these specialist teachers had a recognised careers qualification.

8. Of those teachers who had some form of careers qualification, the most frequently listed one was the Diploma in Advanced Studies in Education (DASE) Counselling and Guidance qualification.

9. Although schools reported that some staff had attended training on careers education, this varied from one day In-Service Education and Training (INSET) opportunities to attending conferences and more formal, accredited courses.

10. The most frequently listed areas in which schools perceived a need for training were “Planning and Co-ordination”, “The Use of Information Technology (IT) in Careers” and “Knowledge of Market Opportunities”.

11. The most preferred route for further training was INSET, although some 55% of schools indicated that a formal qualification would be useful.

Cross-Curricular Provision

12. Approximately 60% of schools indicated that they provided guidelines to assist subject teachers to highlight careers education within their schemes of work. Typically such guidelines were based on publications from the Department of Education and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA).

13. Schools used a variety of formal and informal approaches to monitoring cross-curricular provision. These included informal meetings and the use of audits, questionnaires and checklists.

Work Experience and Mock Interviews

14. Practices for these important aspects of careers provision were described by schools in terms of the classes involved, the types of employers involved and the duration and time of year.

15. Most work experience activity took place from Year 12 onwards, usually involved a range of employer types and lasted five days per placement.

16. Mock interviews occurred most often in Year 12 and involved a range of interviewers including employers, NIBEP, Industry Matters, T&EA and school staff. The evidence suggested that most schools conducted mock interviews during the second term of the school year.

Careers Guidance and Personal Career Planning

17. Careers guidance most often occurred from Year 10 onwards with an emphasis on all pupils having access to such provision in Year 12. Outside of Year 12, up to one third of schools reported that they provided such guidance to those pupils who sought it.

18. Personal Career Planning also largely took place in most schools from Year 10 onwards. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was an all-year-round activity in most schools as opposed to happening at a particular time of the year. Although careers teachers were primarily involved in the planning exercise with pupils, other participants included Industry Matters, T&EA and other teachers.

Management Issues

19. While 85% of schools reported that their Heads of Careers Department had a written job description, only 41% of schools indicated that other teachers involved in careers provision had a specific reference to careers in their job descriptions.

20. Over 80% of schools reported that the Head of Careers Department attended meetings of Heads of Departments. However, just over two thirds of schools reported that their careers departments had formal meetings.

21. Some two thirds of schools reported that they had formal arrangements for regularly reviewing and evaluating their careers programme.

Resources

22. Schools reported on their physical, financial and ICT resources. Over two thirds of schools reported that they had separate interview rooms and a separate office for their Head of Department.

23. There were considerable differences in the amounts of funding made available to careers departments across the capitation allowance, books allowance, hardware allowance, IT allowance and reprographics allowance.

24. In terms of ICT, 95% of schools made use of careers software and 55% of schools made use of the Internet as part of careers education.

Feedback on Careers Provision

25. Over one half of schools sought feedback on their careers service from pupils; just under one quarter sought feedback from parents and a similar percentage sought feedback from employers.

26. While schools noted key successes such as progressing their pupils to higher education or employment, schools also highlighted difficulties such as time, resources, administration and financial constraints as posing the biggest obstacles to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

27. The data suggest that training is a key issue for schools with large numbers of participants not having had formal training in such a key area of the curriculum. Training should focus on providing up-to-date information in an accessible way to pupils, utilising ICT in an effective, planned manner which encourages a planned and co-ordinated coverage of careers.

28. There is scope for developing a more formal structure for careers departments, as the evidence from schools suggested loose structures which may prevent the development of best practice and co-ordination with other subject areas throughout schools.

29. More timetabled periods for the planning, preparation, delivery of careers education and follow-up work, together with additional resources such as administrative support, space and up-to-date materials, should also be addressed.

30. Continued and better linkages with employers should be encouraged through existing mechanisms such as NIBEP and directly between schools and employers. Opportunities for employers to evaluate and develop provision should be encouraged.

METHODOLOGY

31. The project entailed a substantial and comprehensive survey of careers provision at Key Stages 3 and 4. A thorough questionnaire was developed, in association with the Project Steering Group established by the Department of Education, to gather the required information. The questionnaire was piloted in a sample of schools prior to its release to all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland.

32. Over 83% of all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland responded to the survey during the final term of the 1999/2000 school year, providing the study with a large body of both quantitative and qualitative information on the careers provision at Key Stages 3 and 4 within their schools.

THE PROJECT

33. The project was undertaken for the Department of Education by BDO Stoy Hayward. The cost of the project was £24,040.

FULL REPORT

34. The full report entitled “Careers Provision in Schools at Key Stages 3 and 4” is available from the Department of Education, price £5¹

This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.

1 Each educational establishment and library is entitled to one free copy

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Statistics and Research Branch, Department of Education*